

Erasmus Policy Statement (Overall Strategy)

The aim of the University of Forestry is to further develop education in accordance to the requirements of European Union by providing modern education and by achieving a larger number of mobile students and teachers to and from Partner Universities.

Erasmus Partner Universities are chosen either following established and well-functioning collaborations during the past years, or by finding new opportunities for collaboration. The strategy is to choose partners with similar programs, so as to be able to offer students a wider range of opportunities in the study programs they follow at home. The Erasmus Program is considered an important instrument for establishing new programs and creating new ones in compliance to the requirements of the labor market. Apart from individual student mobilities, the University's strategy is also to be able to participate in joint activities, such as Intensive Programs, that can be attended by a larger group of students. They can, in this way, be taught by teachers from partner countries from the Erasmus subprogram.

Most of our partners (in present and the past) are from central European countries, like Germany and Austria, although we have partners from further geographic countries, such as Italy (Sardinia), Portugal, Turkey, Scotland, etc.

The most important objectives of all mobilities are academic and professional ones (for the students: receiving modern education and good professional skills, for teachers: upgrading teaching methods as well as teaching content, finding new collaboration opportunities). On a wider cultural level, the aim is, for young people, the acquaintance with different European countries and peoples and developing European awareness. Students are interested in both the academic and the cultural background. Staff objectives vary: from teaching abroad, to maintaining existing academic contacts or developing other activities with partner universities.

Our student target group covers mainly first cycle students (Bachelor students); although we have had already some second cycle students (Master students) with no third cycle (Doctoral) students till now.

Double/multiple/joint degree is the next logical step of development. We have made research of such possibilities with one of our Erasmus partners: a Conference on Double Degrees was attended by the Institutional Coordinator. Considering the rising numbers of foreign students enrolled in our University for degree programs, as well as modernization efforts in present to improve material conditions, this is a possible future development.

By signing Bilateral Agreements, the University Partner Circle is enlarged, which brings about as a consequence a wider range of possibilities under the Program, such as participation in Intensive Programs, as an active form of short-term education of wider groups of international students and teachers. This opportunity is/was followed now and in the past by coordinating or taking part in consortia for 3-year periods (Intensive Program Projects), and this was done in three Faculties as a very successful educational form both for students and teachers. This type of activity became traditional for the mobility-engaged faculties, and they participate in new applications for such projects, to be implemented in the next years. Among the five key issues included in the Modernization Agenda, the first one (quote): to increase the number of higher education graduates'; we expect the Erasmus mobility opportunities to make a difference, because applicants for the University are aware of it and understand the added value of this opportunity. As far as graduation is concerned, ex-Erasmus students do graduate very well and with ease, so that we can say it facilitates the graduation process by providing better skills to students even today, and we expect it in future, too.

The second issue: 'to improve the quality and relevance of teaching and researcher training, to equip graduates with the knowledge and core transferable competences they need to succeed in high-skill occupations'; we expect the basic impact of Erasmus program to cover students, because they can, once graduated, find career opportunities on the labor market or continue studying for the next education levels with greater ease. We expect teaching to be influenced very much, both with regards to content and evolving teaching methods in the direction of more practically oriented, business-connected ones.

The third issue: 'to provide more opportunities for students to gain additional skills through study or training abroad, and to encourage cross-border co-operation to boost higher education performance' will certainly be of high value as well; today we can see our ex-Erasmus students progress both professionally and culturally, acquire self-confidence and emerge as the new European citizens. Erasmus students win international contests and excel among their peers in the University, and in the long-run these people have brilliant professional career and life.

The fourth issue: 'to strengthen the "knowledge triangle", linking education, research and business' is the one we put highest expectations on, because it is really best demonstrated for our institution. Not only did mobile students participate in study activity abroad, but also we managed to insert a similar study module in a Bachelor degree program, starting in the 2012-2013 academic year. This module is implemented and directly inspired by business. It is of high importance, because not only Erasmus students, but all cohort students from 3rd and 4th year of this program take part in it. I consider this to be one the best consequences of Intensive Programs, attended for almost the whole period with active Erasmus (and Socrates before) ever since 2000.

The last issue is really hard to implement, especially having in mind the economical conditions our country lives in right now. By this I mean, that for a small HEI, such as ours, finding complementary funding still remains a matter of the future, which brings us to a high expectation on this point as well.

In my view, it is very much linked to the overall economic conditions, but also brings further development of funding ideas, together with the implementing of the above mentioned practical module.